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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: PUK-GORAN VIOLENCE CONTINUES

REF: BAGHDAD 0417

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

12. (C) Summary: A series of violent incidents beginning February 16 involving shootings and stabbings between supporters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Goran (Kurdish for "change") political movement has raised concern on all sides. The violence had been foreshadowed by information Goran senior leadership had received from sources inside the PUK. Party and government officials have come to see that the parties, use of noisy campaign caravans have become provocative, especially late in the evening as alcohol has had an increasing effect. Although each side blames the other for the incidents, PUK has more resources both to be able to exacerbate or contain the situation. End summary.

Prelude to Fireworks in Sulaimaniyah  
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13. (C) Goran deputy head Muhammad Tofiq contacted RRT on February 16 to request he meet with Goran chief Nawshirwan Mustafa. Mustafa indicated that Goran had received information from multiple sources within the PUK (close to Goran supporters) about a PUK plan to raise the level of tension in Sulaimaniyah by threatening Goran supporters. His sources claim that PUK Finance Bureau head, Daler Said Majeed, called together a group of low level PUK members, young and loyal but not known widely as active PUK members, and offered to provide them vehicles, weapons and money to stir up trouble. According to the sources, Majeed told the group that this could include shooting as long as it appeared to be a random act of violence and would not be pinned on PUK. Mustafa said he believes that only the U.S. has the influence to stop this cycle by telling Presidents Talabani and Barzani that they cannot allow any trouble in the region. He asked the PRT to send the clear message to PUK that the U.S. is watching closely to assure the election is "free and fair."

The Action Begins Later That Night...  
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14. (C) Although PUK and Goran versions about what set off clashes between PUK and Goran supporters the night of February 16 differ, the following version we deem most credible. Around 12:30 a.m. shooting began in front of the Sulaimaniyah Malband (PUK branch office of which First Lady Hero Talabani has been the director for the last two months). (Note: The Malband is located on Salim Street, a main street in Sulaimaniyah where nightly campaign caravans gather. End note.) Reportedly, Peshraw Ahmed (former head of KRG PM Dr. Barham Salih's personal security detail and currently a Goran member) had exchanged strong words with

Sulaimaniyah Asayish head Hakim Qadir over an earlier incident involving Ahmed, s brother. A possibly intoxicated Ahmed and a group of friends later passed in front of the Malband in vehicles. An argument started with the Asayish, then escalated into a fight. Either Malband security or the Asayish opened fire, wounding three Goran supporters. Malband guards claimed that Ahmed had started shooting first at the building, so the guards returned fire. Goran supporters said that Malband security started firing first. Security officials initially considered the shooting an assassination attempt of the first lady, as she had been in the building at the time. The three injured were taken to Sulaimaniyah Emergency Hospital and nine others were arrested.

15. (C) At the hospital, Goran leader Awat Sheikh Janab said Q5. (C) At the hospital, Goran leader Awat Sheikh Janab said that an Asayish unit arrived to take the injured men away, but they did not have arrest warrants. Janab called Sulaimaniyah Province Asayish Director Hakim Qadir asking that they wait until the men were treated and the judge drew up arrest warrants. Meanwhile, a Sulaimaniyah police lieutenant arrived at the hospital to interrogate the men. While he was doing so a group of as many as 150 fully armed men arrived in Hummers. (Note: Sources in Sulaimaniyah say the unit with the Hummers was the Counter-Terrorism Group (CTG), but KRG Minister of Interior (KMOI) Kareem Sinjari later told RRT Team Leader that the unit belonged to the Asayish. End Note.) The police at the hospital tried to stop the group from taking the injured men, but they were brushed aside. The team reportedly pulled the most critically wounded out of a Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine, put bags on the heads of all three of the injured and took them away. Of the 12 who were taken into custody, six were released without charge on February 18, and the remaining six were released on February 21. Charges of attempted assassination were downgraded to possession of a weapon without a license and are reportedly pending for the latter six. KMOI Sinjari later told Erbil RRT Team Leader that he had complained to Hakim Qadir about his decision to send the Asayish to the hospital, saying the matter should have been left to the police.

#### Subsequent Clashes

16. (C) Two nights later shortly after 9:00 p.m. on February 18, anti-riot police rather surprisingly left the flashpoint Salim Street area, according to an eyewitness who spoke with RRT staff. When immediately following this a security detail bringing high-level PUK officials to the Malband tried to clear a dense crowd of pedestrians, including by firing into the air, the crowd started throwing rocks and water bottles at the guards. The guards reportedly shot in the direction of the rock throwers, and there was reportedly fire returned from a nearby building. The next morning there were reports of still another PUK-Goran confrontation, when Goran officials and supporters tried to open a new campaign office in Bakrajo (a suburb of Sulaimaniyah). The road to the new office runs in front of the Bakrajo PUK Malband, and PUK guards stopped the Goran convoy. An argument ensued, reportedly resulting in gunfire by both sides. Each side blamed the other for starting the shooting, but according to election security committee member Zana Salih, an investigation by the committee showed that it was likely that the PUK guards initiated firing.

#### Comment

17. (C) These incidents have significantly raised the level of concern on all sides. The potential for violence to spiral upward is real unless all parties exercise restraint. However, the orders to lower the temperature must come from the top levels of political party leadership. Emotions are raw, so unless definitive action is taken quickly and decisions are communicated to all levels, the risk still exists that excitable party loyalists may continue to engage

in violence.  
HILL